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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

LETTERS OF EDWARD DOWDEN AND HIS CORRESPONDENTS. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1914.

With Edward Dowden, criticism, far from being a mode of self-expression, was a task that demanded the complete elimination of personality, "a subordination of self to the faithful setting forth of the entire truth of one's subject." No one at all familiar with his writings could well imagine that the lack of a personal element in them proceeded from a hard, dry, uncommunicative spirit; yet few outside the circle of his intimate friends can have guessed how much profitable pleasure his published correspondence would give to all honest-minded readers who care for the things of the intellect and strive to harmonize its claims, as he did, with those of life and of duty. Professor Dowden was a great letter-writer; he enjoyed writing to his friends (in fact, he was inclined to prefer this way of communicating with them), and he took pains to write well—to do himself justice. One feels, with constant satisfaction, just this—that the letters do the man justice. They are careful in expression, even studied—as good in style as anything he ever wrote;—but he was quite unlike those weak-eyed observers of life who have to look at a thing askance—as men do at a faint comet—in order to see it clearly, and must needs write hastily and moodily in order to represent their real selves. On the contrary, the more intently and directly he took time to see, the more "natural," in all true senses of the word, he was.

The Edward Dowden whom we come to know through his letters—and we come, it seems, to know him really well—is a man, above all, of singular equipoise; a man of warm sympathies, yet carefully just; of catholic tastes, yet of uncompromising discriminations; a thoroughly normal man. "I have always had good health," he says somewhere, in explaining a certain want of sympathy with romantic uncanniness, "and my father brought me up on Whately's *Evidences*." He is capable, not only as critic, but as man, of big, clean thoughts: these come to him without special effort. "I wonder," he remarks, casually, in a letter to his brother—"I wonder how many thousands of souls has industry saved. How much true enlightenment and liberality of mind commerce has brought about. A great deal, I think." And then he passes lightly to another topic; for he always knows exactly what he can best say in a given space of words or time, and never bores us with the struggle to think on paper. The thought remains unamplified; but we rejoice at even a bit of *that* kind of thinking. Here and everywhere the man's mental output is totally unlike that of the morbidly or shyly solitary thinker, though Dowden loved solitude in a measure, as do most men who are thinkers at all, and believed that the best flowed out of him, not in the tumult of many ideas, but in

"the brooding possession of a few." Human contacts, to be sure, are necessary to preserve mental balance such as his.

And along with his equipoise he possessed in rare unison the blessed gift of humor—of humor with an occasional note of "irrepressibility" in it, such as we may think characteristically Irish; though he called himself, in deprecation of such a thought, merely a "half-breed Irishman," and certainly was never in the shallower sense patriotic for Ireland. He was in fact rather discontented with the restricted round of life in Dublin, and found in the life of the country nothing with which he could particularly identify himself. For the notion that a national literature could be built upon the ancient folklore and epic base he had but little sympathy. The literary soil of Ireland seemed to him, on the whole, rather thin, and for hot-house growths he did not greatly care. On one occasion, indeed, he deliberately and bravely incurred unpopularity by writing to the committee in charge of arrangements for the Moore centenary, to the effect that such an honor as a centenary celebration should be reserved for poets in a high sense of the word great. Perhaps, after all, the note we catch in his humor is that of the eternal boy rather than of the Celt, though Celtic enough are his heartiness and his flexibility of spirit. If in us there be anything of these qualities, we warm to him the more because he is able to write even with remote irreverence to Wordsworth, the poet he loved and so often defended: "I made only one purchase—a portrait of Wordsworth, in which he looks like a silly old sheep going to baa out some sonnets." If there be a possible humorous side to Wordsworth, this possibility has seldom been better hit off in a few words.

As a man who drew strength and wisdom from literature in almost the same way as from life, Professor Dowden knew how to speak the right word of encouragement to fellow-writers dispirited by the reaction from a completed task, and to hearten the good workman without overpraising the goodness of the work. He would, too, on the least occasion, come to the assistance of a man with whom he fundamentally disagreed, when he thought that the latter had been too sharply assailed. Thus he promptly and vigorously replied to a friend who blamed Matthew Arnold rather too sweepingly for his failure to understand Shelley, that Arnold could take a sympathetic view of Shelley only by violating the unity of his own intellectual life. Moreover, in Dowden, along with this robust sense of truth and justice—as of the strenuous and large-hearted toiler—there is an occasional subtlety as far as possible from being the fruit merely of learning and the generous exercise of the mind. Now and then he would outline an intellectual emotion as delicately as could Pater—as when, for instance, he speaks of "the deep fact of fraternity, which is like a finer sex—a certain invisible barrier lying beyond it, as a certain barrier lies between man and woman." A man is known by the phrases he makes, and Dowden's phrasing—felt as a constant enrichment of his thought and as the power to meet adequately the demand of every right feeling—proves him, even in his prose, something of a poet: his prose has in unusual measure the poetic element without which writing of whatever kind is but the salt that has lost its savor.

A poet, indeed, he was, by instinct and by lasting preference—though not embittered, as some writers of less poetic talent have been, because the world would have from him prose instead of verse. "One of my afflictions," he wrote to his friend J. A. Noble in 1878, "is a theory that I

could do my best work in verse, and the circumstance that every year my lectures lead me to accumulating a quantity of material that is pleasant property for my outer mind, but is a positive injury to the soul within the soul." No doubt he was right as to this, but he was still more right in the determination that kept him to his soberer tasks. The verses he did compose he thought "so far good that each is a genuine record of some moment of pleasure or some moment of mastery of pain; but I know how small a pinhole in the universe they all peep at." At least he had the pleasure of knowing that this work of his was sincere and of worth—a knowledge unspoiled by over-modesty or by disappointment.

He had his share of drudgery as a teacher, and he hated the dreary toil of making out examinations and reading papers, as all the elect do. "Think of having to torture Adonais into questions, and then to find that one's own questions are indeed poetry compared with the answers which a foolish conscience obliges me to read." Yet his conscience went deeper in such matters than the foolishness of reading dull papers. He desired to give his pupils the literary bread of life, in larger measure than is usually possible. "I am afraid," he once wrote, "we in college lectures give too much of the history of literature, and too little of literature itself. I should like to have a small class sitting round a table, and go through chosen poems from such books as the *Golden Treasury*—trying to deepen the feeling for what is beautiful in literature, rather than the talk about books and authors which may tend certainly to broaden, but does not do much to deepen, one's sense of what is best in poetry." Despite drudgery, there is plenty of evidence that Dowden took pleasure in most kinds of the work he did; including the literary joinery and work of remodeling involved in making a little book out of his big book on Shelley—this last a very real kind of enjoyment, as he testifies.

As a critic he, in later years, charged himself with "too ready submission" to authors whom he was "right in admiring with qualifications," and wished to set forth his reservation about such as Goethe, Walt Whitman, and George Eliot. The writers mentioned, however, are not the ones with whom his name is chiefly associated and whom he most studied. These were, of course, Shakespeare, Shelley, and Wordsworth, and in relation to them he could scarcely accuse himself of partisanship, beyond the involuntary partisanship of imperfect human knowledge. He was, indeed, no blind worshiper at any shrine. "No poet," he wrote, "has been, or ever can be, to me quite what Wordsworth has been, for during many years I was lost in him. It was Shakespeare who made me a citizen of the world; but all my vows (substitutes for those of poverty, chastity, and obedience) were heard by Wordsworth." Yet there is temperateness in his ardor: the maximum of sympathy with the minimum of hyperbole. Toward Shakespeare he felt, like others, great and small, a kind of awe—"I looked on each of his great plays as a huge Alp in an Alpine range"—and he confesses that he has often turned from him, "in order to read what I admired far less." The less great could hardly hold him. Drawn to Browning as he was inevitably in the beginning—as to Walt Whitman—he eventually tired of him. "My falling away from Browning," he wrote in 1902, "dates from 'Pachiarotto.' . . . I seemed to have learned by heart all he had to tell, and I did not want it said over in a more tangled way." As attesting his catholicity as a critic and his sensitive response to genius, it is pleasant to know that Dowden was among the first to note the

promise of Swinburne—a soul so different from his own and from those he most admired. Writing in 1865, he told his brother: "If I were to risk a prophecy I should say that Mrs. Swinburne's *cousin*, I think, the author of 'Atalanta in Calydon,' is the most promising of the young writers." Dowden was always well aware of Swinburne's posing, and by a law of his own nature he disliked the poet's diabolism and excesses of all kinds; but he could admire even where he did not wholly like, and he had a good word even for Swinburne's critical faculty, "full of fire and penetrating admiration," though "quite untrustworthy." Always despite much "submission," he preserved his soul entire; he dreaded to lose himself in the "maelstrom" of Goethe, and cried out from the depths that Goethe is not an all-sufficing gospel.

As in the case of nearly all great men, we are smitten with wonder, when we approach his life closely, at the much that Dowden accomplished despite drudgery and distractions, though to him our "much" was little enough. Professor Dowden liked his leisure and his musings. "I swim and walk and lie on the cliffs in the sun all day and every day," he writes from the coast of Kerry; and often to a similar effect. He had time for this sort of thing, though not so much as he wished for; and one letter reveals him as an interested, if not an enthusiastic, golfer. We remember that the fine spirit that sees its way clearly and moves undistractedly, knowing that there are other things in the world besides labor and learning, may surprise us by the amount of its accomplishment as well as can the spirit, less fine perhaps and altogether strenuous by temperament, of the born deliver.

THE BERRY PAPERS. Edited by LEWIS MELVILLE. New York: John Lane Company, 1914.

One would like to find in these letters of Mary and Agnes Berry—genuine, familiar records of social life from 1763 to 1852—one would like to find in these letters, rescued from forgetfulness and carefully edited, something of real value to human nature and to scholarship; and one is inclined to feel some shame that one is not easily able to do so. The special claim of the Berry sisters to our consideration is that Horace Walpole took very particular notice of them. "Many who would long since have sunk into oblivion," writes Mr. Melville, "survive until to-day in the pages of the greatest biographer or the greatest letter-writer that the world has ever known. This, it must be confessed, is the lot of Mary and Agnes Berry." For them Walpole wrote his *Reminiscences of the Courts of George I. and George II.*, and to them he dedicated the famous *Catalogue of Strawberry Hill*. He was lover-like toward both in a caressing, elderly way, and he playfully referred to them as his two wives. So far as the personality or genius of the Earl of Orford is concerned, the record is not very illuminating. It shows him perhaps rather more in the light of a good-natured and somewhat silly old fellow than we have been accustomed to think of him. He was even said to be jealous of the friendship of Mary Berry for the talented sculptress Mrs. Damer—before her marriage, Anne Seymour Conway—whose statue as the Muse of Sculpture, carved by Ceracchi, stands in the entrance-hall of the British Museum.

As personalities, the letter-writers are, for the most part, grievously disappointing. The sisters and Mrs. Damer are extremely garrulous, and as